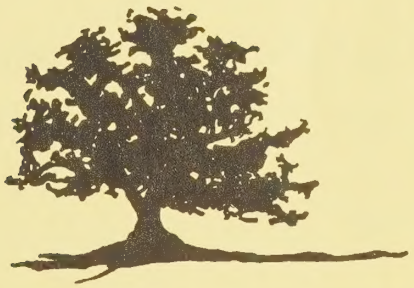
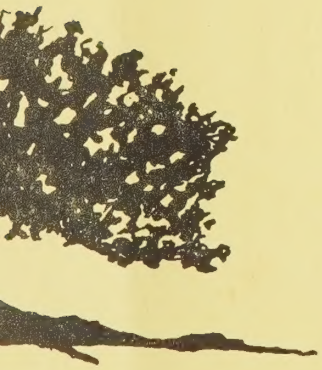
CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Thousand Oaks General Plan





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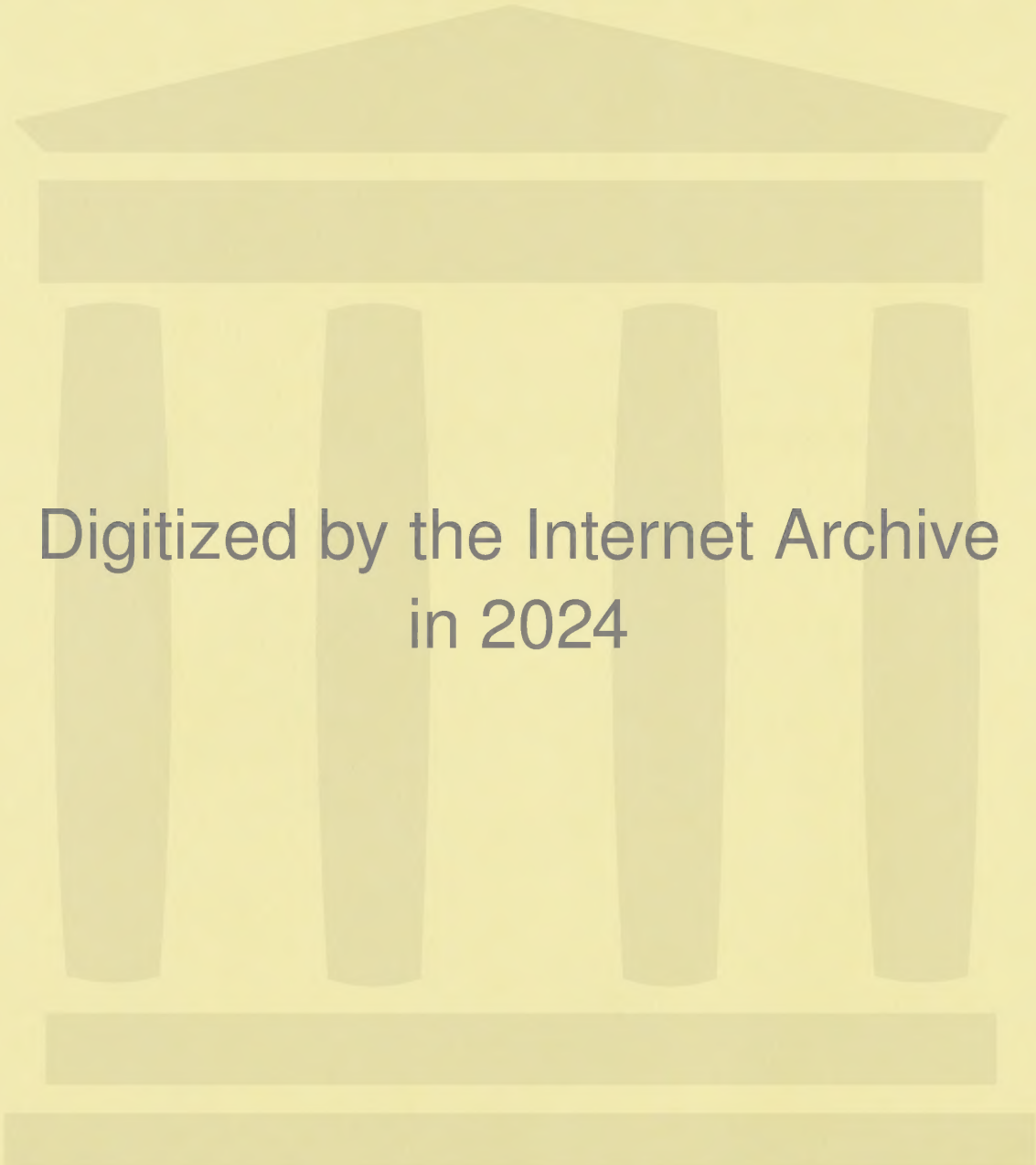

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CONSERVATION ELEMENT

THOUSAND OAKS GENERAL PLAN

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CONSERVATION ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Conservation is the process by which the essential character of natural resources is preserved while these resources are in some way utilized by man. It is a positive action to assure that as a region grows and absorbs population and development, its important natural resources are not lost or permanently altered to the detriment of natural processes or human enjoyment.

While conservation in principle implies a set of limitations to human activity with respect to environmental resources, it also recognizes the ability of these resources to tolerate or support development. The application of conservation to land-use planning would recognize the limitations and opportunities for development intrinsic to the various natural resources of the region and establish policies which recognize these factors.

The City of Thousand Oaks does not have the legacy of mistakes many other cities have in failing to recognize either the constraints or opportunities presented by the environment. For the most part, the opportunities of the future are far more significant than the problems of the past.

There has also been demonstrated a sensitivity on the part of the people to the quality of the environment and a desire to preserve its amenities in the process of building the city. These feelings were well-expressed in the attitude surveys taken prior to preparation of the General Plan and are translated into policy guides through the goals and policies of the Plan. Tools to carry out these general goals have been devised and implemented, as well.

The Conservation Element expands on the environmental research and policy formulation done in the preparation of the General Plan. Land forms and natural features of the Conejo Valley have been surveyed and categorized in a relevant and useful classification system. Development policies incorporating the intrinsic suitability of the land for urban and other uses are proposed to guide the application of the implementation tools available to the City. This approach proceeds from the basic premise that the environment possesses both values and restrictions to the different components of urban structure. To incorporate these factors with greater precision in the planning process is the main purpose of this Element.

COORDINATION WITH THE OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

The General Plan goals listed in the Open Space Element as being directly related to that Element have also guided the preparation of the Conservation Element. Both Elements are concerned with the relationship of man and nature in the Conejo Valley and both establish criteria for preservation of valuable features of the natural environment. These criteria and policies have been closely coordinated in the preparation of the Elements.

Furthermore, the Conservation Element relies to a significant degree on information developed and policies recommended by the Planning Commission's Open Space Committee for use in preparing the Open Space Element. Both Elements also emphasize the important role of land use regulations related to environmental factors in preserving open space and natural resources rather than extensive programs of land acquisition.

This Element is distinct from the Open Space Element in that it sets the basic parameters for development intrinsic in the different natural land and water features of the Valley, while the Open Space Element designates specific lands with a variety of land-form types to be incorporated within developmental projects or preserved in an essentially undeveloped state for a number of purposes. The Elements are thus closely inter-related but not redundant.

NATURAL FEATURES AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The Conejo Valley has a wide range of physiographic features characterized by their value for natural process and their suitability for various kinds and intensities of urban land uses. Recognizing this fact, the region can be surveyed for its important physiographic features or land-forms. Once inventoried, these can be categorized and ranked in a hierarchy of intrinsic suitability for urban uses, which if reversed becomes a hierarchy of intolerance to urban uses. Figure 1, below, presents such a system adapted to the character of the natural environment of the Conejo Valley.

Figure 1

Land-Form	Tolerance to Urban Use
Flat Land	High
Lakeshore	
Forests, woodlands	
Moderate Slopes	
Steep slopes	
Floodplains	
Streams, marshes, barrancas Wildlife habitat	Low

This hierarchy describes in a generalized fashion the degree of limitation the natural environment presents to urban development.

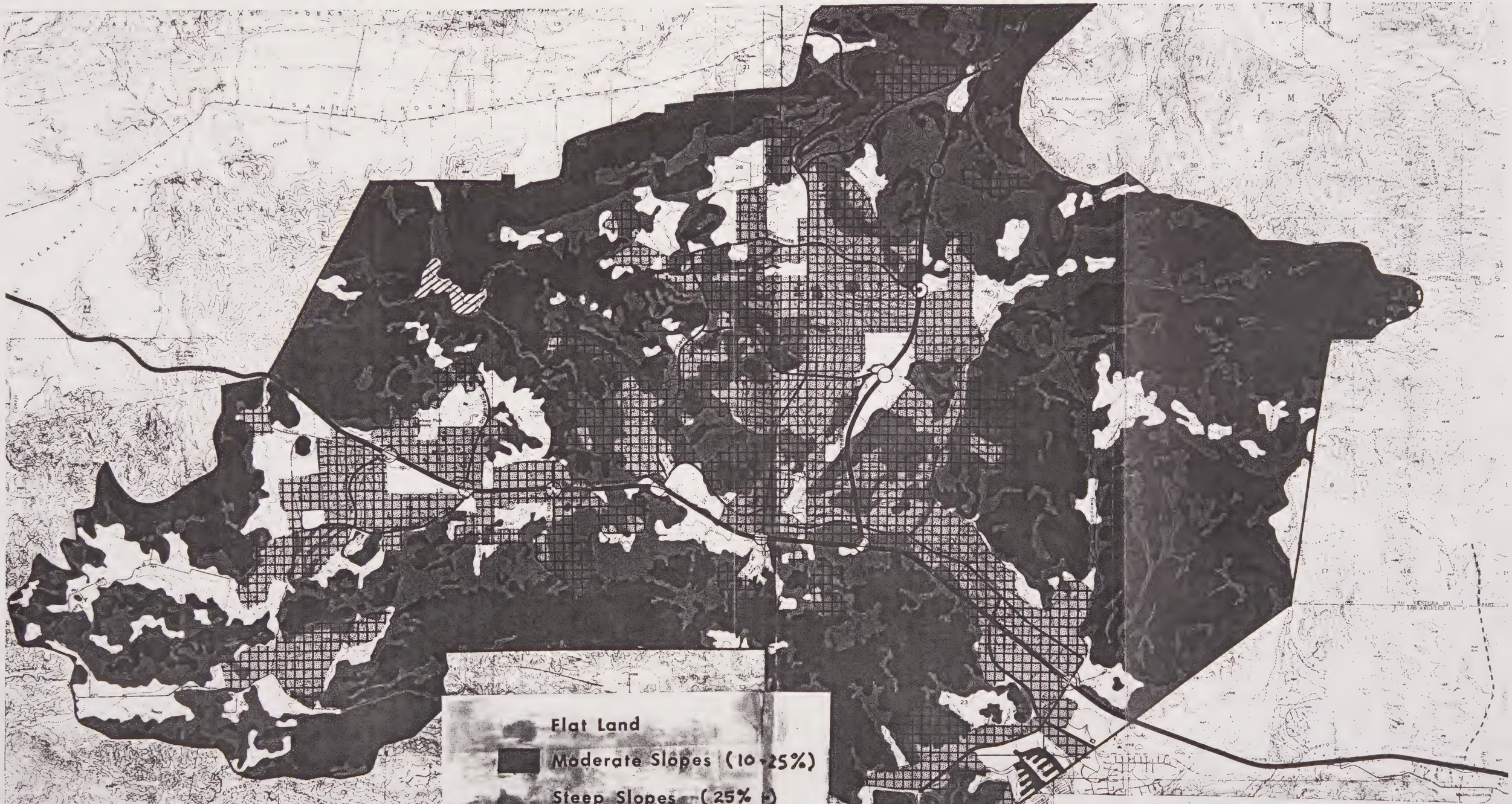
It begins with the basic proposition that certain areas are more intrinsically suitable for certain uses while others are less so. Optimally, development should occur on the more intolerant land-forms only when it does not substantially harm the natural processes of the land-form category or when superior values are created.

A more detailed discussion of the limitations associated with each category, in the specific context of its character in the Thousand Oaks area, follows. In these sections, information regarding the extent and location of the different land-form categories is also presented. This information is portrayed graphically on the Conservation Element Maps (Figures 2 and 3) as well.

A. Flat Land

Flat land is defined for the purposes of this Element as land with a slope of less than 10%. It is intrinsically suited to many kinds of land uses, ranging from the most intensive urban uses through active recreation to agriculture. Natural limitations on the uses suitable to a particular site of flat land generally derive from numerous soil characteristics, such as its shrink-swell potential (expansibility), load-bearing ability and erosion hazard.

In Thousand Oaks, there have been problems with highly expansive soils on relatively flat land causing cracked foundations. These and other soil



LANDFORMS AND NATURAL FEATURES

FIGURE 2

THOUSAND OAKS

STREAM
MAJOR OAK GROVE
CHAPARRAL
SAGE
MAJOR BARRANCA

LANDFORMS AND NATURAL FEATURES

FIGURE 3

and geologic problems potentially associated with construction on flat land can be avoided or compensated for by proper geologic and soils investigation prior to development. A more detailed examination of soils and geology in the Conejo Valley would be included in the proposed Seismic Element of the General Plan.

Because of its intrinsic suitability for so many kinds of uses, flat land which is suitable for urban development may also be as suitable for agricultural or active recreation uses. Protection of those areas depends upon the importance of these values to the community.

In Thousand Oaks, much of the flat land has already been developed in urban uses. Some of the remaining flat land is included in or proposed for parkland, as indicated in the Recreation and Open Space Elements of the Plan. Flat land proposed for future urban development is in scattered sites of up to a thousand acres located as indicated in Figure 2.

Approximately 28% of the Planning Area's 60 square miles is classified as flat land, of which at least half is now developed or committed to development by subdivision or Development Permit approval.

Development Policies

General Plan policies for land use and existing planning implementation tools

including zoning, precise plan requirements and parkland dedication ordinance are appropriate in these areas.

B. Lakes and Lakeshores

Surface water in the Thousand Oaks Planning Area is and will be limited to man-made lakes and small creeks. There are no major rivers, natural lakes, nor seacoast. Surface water is intrinsically suited to those uses which do not diminish its present or prospective values for recreation or amenity.

Man-made lakes are suitable to a wide variety of uses, including recreation, residential, commercial, institutional and light industrial. The most important factors which determine the suitability of a particular land use for a lakefront location are the possibility of water pollution and the effect upon the scenic amenity of the lake. Where no water pollution is caused by the proposed use and its development on a lakefront site complements the scenic and recreation value of the lake, then the surface water character of the area poses no special limitations.

In the Conejo Valley, the existing lakeshore resources consist of Westlake Lake, as indicated in Figure 2.

Development Policies

Water resources should be preserved in an unpolluted state. Use of man-made lakes for recreation and scenic amenity is appro-

priate and most land uses are suitable for shoreline development subject to the applicable General Plan Policies.

C. Forests, Woodlands

The Conejo Valley contains no forests in the sense of extensive stands of large trees, but it nevertheless does contain a wide variety of vegetation resources including some heavily wooded areas.

Vegetation performs many important functions, particularly with respect to balancing the more catastrophic effects of water runoff on the land by reducing erosion, sedimentation and runoff. In addition, woodlands are important as wildlife habitat and scenic features.

The most comprehensive information regarding the characteristics of vegetation communities in the Thousand Oaks area is included in a report entitled "Ecological Survey of Thousand Oaks", by Dr. Clinton Schonberger of Moorpark College. He investigated three important and extensive natural communities of plants primarily located in the open space surrounding the City. These are the Southern Oak woodland, the Chapparal and Coastal Sage Scrub.

At one time, the oak woodlands of this area were unique in the State as a place where oaks of

the Southern Oak Woodland and the Foothill Woodland co-existed. Now, only one representative species of the Foothill Oaks remains in the Valley, with the remaining oaks being of the southern variety. Major oak groves are indicated in Figure 3. The best oaks are in the Oakbrook Regional Park and Skeleton Canyon areas, but even in these places the ground cover underneath the oaks is too sparse for the groves to prosper.

The Chapparal community in the Conejo Valley is best represented on the flank of the Santa Monica mountains to the south of the City, with the most healthy and impressive stands in the Newbury Park - Potrero Road area. Associated with healthy chapparal communities are a host of other plants and numerous animals including deer, bobcats and occasional mountain lions.

Coastal Sage Scrub is a community of several species of low grey-green shrubs, found throughout the undeveloped portion of the Planning Area, with the best formation to be found above the Arroyo Conejo near the end of Calle Yucca.

Development Policies

The most important type of vegetation from the standpoint of community values is the oak woodland. Municipal policy has been defined in Ordinance No. 137-NS, which requires issuance of a permit by the City Manager before oak trees

may be removed. This Ordinance must be enforced to preserve the trees, particularly in those areas where there are healthy stands of oaks that are important to the character of large areas, such as in Skeleton Canyon and Oakbrook Regional Park.

Since the other communities of vegetation occur primarily on hillsides or in barrancas, development policies in those areas will be primarily reflective of the slope and natural amenities character of the land, which would tend to limit density and preserve the natural vegetation. Such preservation, with adequate fire protection measures, is necessary to control soil erosion in steeper terrain.

D. Land With Moderate Slopes

These lands are defined for purposes of this Element as land with slope between 10% and 25%. It is intrinsically suited to development which requires less topographic disturbance than development appropriate to flat land. Except in the core area of the Planning Area, very low density residential uses are suited to this kind of terrain.

Erosion control is an important factor in determining appropriate densities on moderately sloping land. Increasing the building and pavement coverage, reduces the area in natural ground cover which helps to secure the soil and slow down runoff. While the erosion control problem is not so critical as on steep land, it is a consideration and serves to reduce allowable density.

Figure 2 locates undeveloped land with slopes between 10% and 25%. Approximately 30% of the Planning Area's land is rated in this category. A small proportion of this land has been developed to date, most of which development has been low density housing.

Development Policies

Land in this category should be restricted to very low density residential development. Sites in this terrain also may be suitable for parks and other open space uses in accordance with the policies of the General Plan Recreation Element. Medium and high density residential development and non-residential uses should be permitted in areas so designated on the General Plan Land Use Element, where extensive topographic modification can be controlled or is not required.

E. Steep Slopes

Land over 25% is classified as steep slopes for purposes of the Conservation Element. Approximately 42% of the Planning Area's land is so classified. It is intrinsically suitable to few urban uses, primarily for reasons of soil erosion control and preservation of the aesthetic quality of the landforms. Open space, certain recreation facilities such as trail systems, and very low density residential development are most

suitable to hillside terrain. Control of soil erosion is an even more pressing problem in areas where slopes are steep than in the moderately sloping land discussed earlier. Drainage is quicker and the role of ground cover in retaining the soil and slowing runoff is more critical. The steeper the slope, the greater the proportion of the land that should remain in an undisturbed, undeveloped state, as outlined in the City's Hillside Development Ordinance.

Figure 2 locates land with slopes in excess of 25%. To date, only a very small proportion of this land has been developed, virtually all in low or very low density residential uses.

Development Policies

The most suitable forms of urban development for steep hillsides are very low density residential uses, recreation areas and facilities, open space, and occasional non-residential structures where such uses conform to the General Plan Land Use Element and can be developed with as little disturbance of the natural terrain as residential uses permitted under the H-P-D or R-P-D zones.

F. Floodplains

Floodplains are intrinsically suitable to nearly all kinds of development - most of the time. As important components of the total drainage system, however, they

are intolerant to development or topographic modification which involves human habitation or permanent structures, or which may diminish the capacity of the plain to carry recurring floods. Uses of the land which are unharmed by flooding and which do not substantially impede the flow of flood waters are therefore appropriate in designated floodplains. Such land uses would include parks, lakes and water-related uses, open space, hiking and riding trails, and certain kinds of agriculture such as row crops.

In the Planning Area, the designation of floodplain areas is still tentative. The Ventura County Flood Control District is proposing to embark upon a comprehensive program of floodplain regulation, which in its early stages would include official designation of flood plain areas in the County based on 50 year or 100 year flood frequency. Preliminary analysis by the Ventura County Associate of Governments indicates no major flood plains within the Areas, but most certainly the relatively flat portions of the Arroyo Conejo in the vicinity of the Hill Canyon Sewage Treatment Plan, as shown in Figure 2 do constitute a potential flood plain.

Development Policies

Land use in flood plains should be restricted to uses enumerated above in the discussion of

suitable uses. The Open Space Element of the General Plan indicates that preservation of flood plains as open space is necessary for public safety purposes. The flood plain downstream of the Hill Canyon Treatment Plant is thus appropriate for preservation and possible development in some recreational use compatible with public safety considerations.

G. Streams, Marshes, Major Barrancas, Wildlife Habitat

Running streams and marshes are intrinsically unsuitable for, and intolerant to, urban development, particularly where they occur in steep, narrow barrancas. Figure 3 locates these natural features in the Planning Area. The creeks are important factors in maintaining communities of vegetation and animal life in the area. The variety of this life in the Arroyo Conejo, for example, is quite extensive and would become even more so if the quality of the water in the stream were better protected from pollution. Other factors limiting the tolerance of running water, and the barrancas to urban-type development are soil erosion and stability problems and the importance of these areas in flood control.

Wildlife habitat, particularly, must be examined in a regional context. At one time, the entire Valley was habitat for wildlife limited only by the capacity of the land and water to support it and the incidence of predators. With the coming of urban development, the

usefulness of most of the area for habitat has been considerably reduced.

However, as a recent Ventura County inventory indicates, the County as a whole contains many areas which, if properly protected, will serve as excellent wildlife habitats, including the Los Padres National Forest. Within this regional context, the survey also designates the area indicated in Figure 4 as a "wildlife area". Also shown in Figure 4 is a proposed acquisition by the local Audubon Society discussed below.

This entire area is important as a place where numerous species of birds and mammals, such as deer, bobcats, raccoons, foxes and coyotes, live. The key factor in this ecological community is the Conejo Creek, the only real woodland stream in this section of the County.

This stream maintains a more or less constant flow and this is the key to its role in the biological system of the area. Marshes are present along much of its length, supporting stands of tule reeds, rushes, cat-tails and other plants in addition to the plants and animals dependent on the running water.

Appendix 1 lists the mammals found in Ventura County and gives information on their abundance, location and general habitat.

Uses of the land which are compatible with these natural features and functions include limited recreation,

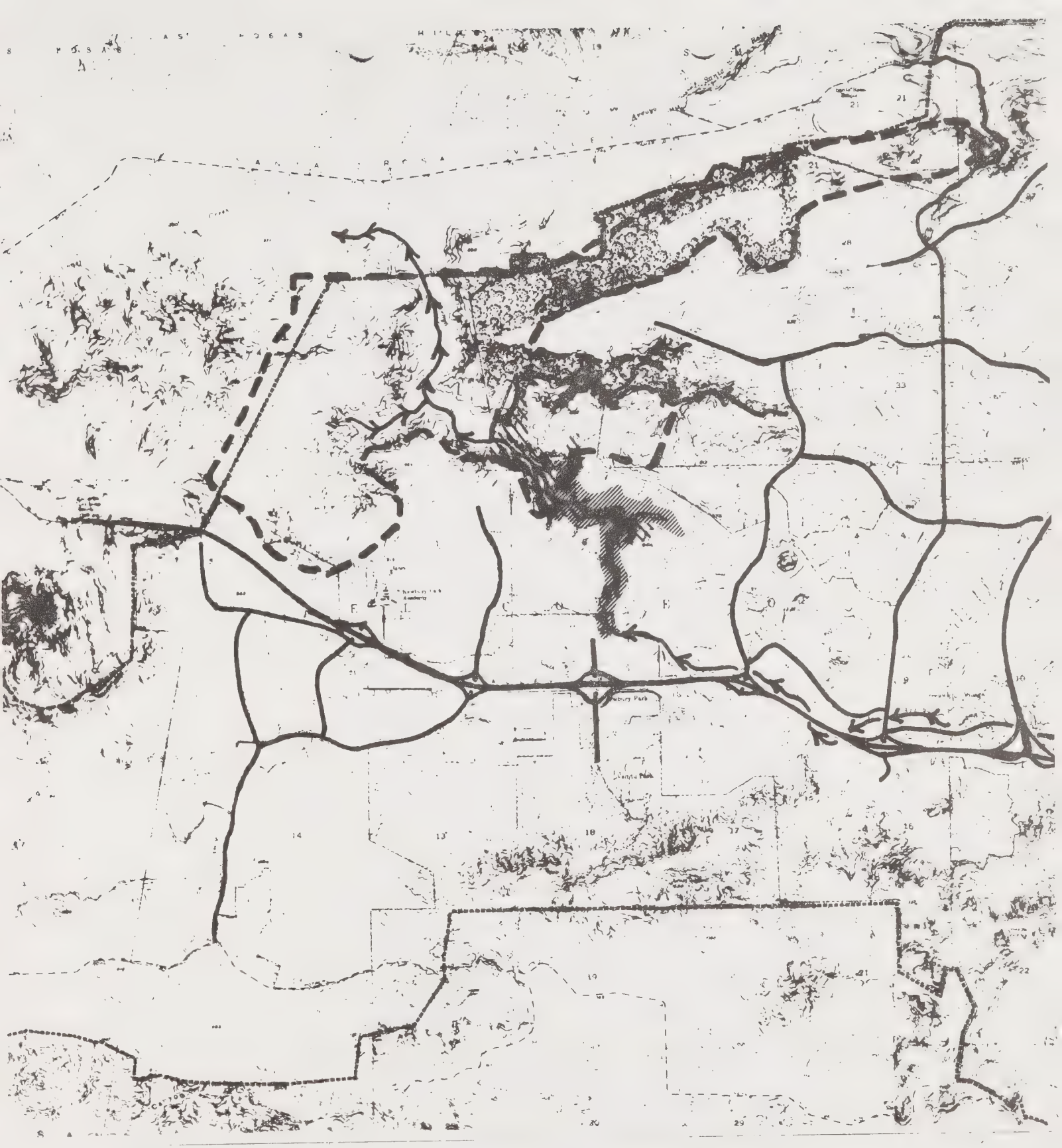

AUDUBON SITES
WILDLIFE AREA
WILDWOOD REGIONAL PARK
CURRENT PROPOSAL
FUTURE

FIGURE 4

such as trail systems and nature study facilities, and open space preservation.

Development Policies

Running streams and marshes in the Planning Area are intolerant to urban development in their immediate vicinity. Use of such areas should be limited to recreation trails, nature study areas and open space for scenic amenity.

Major barrancas should also be preserved in a natural state where such preservation does not negate their value for flood control purposes. Appropriate land uses for these natural features include recreation trails and open space.

The highest priority for conservation in the Conejo Valley is the Arroyo Conejo west of Lynn Road to the Santa Rosa Valley. The local chapter of the Audubon Society is attempting to secure title to portions of the Arroyo in the vicinity of the Science Center for a bird sanctuary.

The Audubon Society is interested in eventually acquiring the portion of the Arroyo between the proposed acquisition and the Regional Park, as well. This area, too, is quite important as wildlife habitat and for nature study and its preservation should be assured.

IMPLEMENTATION

Carrying out the objectives and policies of the Conservation Element requires that use of the land be regulated in such a way as to be compatible with the environmental characteristics of the area. This can be, and has been, done through a variety of techniques ranging from zoning to acquisition of full fee title to the land.

In most cases, land use regulation through the zoning ordinance is the appropriate method. The Hillside Planned Development zone is an excellent implementation tool for the policies of this Element with regard to land in the moderate and steep slope categories. Permitted density and site coverage are related to average slope, recognizing the needs for runoff control, soil erosion control and preserving the scenic features of the hillsides. Application of the H-P-D zone will also preserve a great deal of woodland, especially the chapparal, since much of it is located on hillsides.

Land use of the two most tolerant natural features - flat land and lakeshore - can be adequately regulated through the zoning ordinance, as well as guided by the goals and policies of the General Plan Land Use Element.

Protection of oak trees can be assured through enforcement of the Oak Tree Ordinance.

In the two least tolerant categories of natural features - the floodplains and streams, marshes, barrancas and wildlife

habitat - acquisition of land may be required because, while these areas are relatively unsuitable for urban use, they do possess great potential for different forms of recreational and educational uses by the general public and should be preserved in a natural state. Whether this is done by the City of Thousand Oaks, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, or a private group such as the Audubon Society, their preservation is so important that some form of public acquisition may be the best method to use. A range of possible acquisition programs for such lands is discussed in the Open Space Element.

Specific implementation procedures that should be utilized in the future to insure conservation of the important natural resources of the Conejo Valley are summarized as follows:

1. Flat land - General Plan Land Use Element policies and zoning ordinance regulations;
2. Lakeshore - General Plan Land Use Element policies and zoning ordinance regulations, appropriate water pollution control measures;
3. Forests, woodlands - Enforcement of the Oak Tree Ordinance; H-P-D Ordinance standards for site coverage where applicable.
4. and 5.
   Moderate and steep slopes - Enforcement of Hillside Planned Development zone criteria; review of Land Use Element and Map and zoning classifications for

conformance to appropriate hillside standards;

6. Floodplains - Coordination with the Ventura County Flood Control District Floodplain Regulation Program; possible acquisition for recreational or open space use;

7. Streams, marshes, barrancas - Acquisition by public or non-profit private body (e.g., the Audubon Society) of the Arroyo Conejo where necessary west of Lynn Road; preservation of barrancas in natural or semi-natural state where such preservation will be adequate for flood control purposes;

8. Wildlife areas - Use of all implementation techniques, such as H-P-D standards, parkland dedication and acquisition where applicable; review of specific plan or General Plan amendment covering the area west of Hill Canyon area to insure preservation of important wildlife habitat, particularly land adjacent to Conejo Creek.

With the adoption of the proposed development policies and utilization of these implementation procedures, the development of the Conejo Valley will proceed in a fashion which not only respects the natural environment, but also increases the general liveability of the area by preserving those natural amenities for which the Conejo Valley is known and for which many people selected it as a place to live and work.

CITY OF THOUSAND OAKS
PLANNING COMMISSION

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF THOUSAND OAKS RECOMMENDING TO THE CITY COUNCIL THE ADOPTION OF THE CONSERVATION ELEMENT OF THE THOUSAND OAKS GENERAL PLAN.

The Planning Commission of the City of Thousand Oaks does hereby resolve as follows:

WHEREAS, a Conservation Element identifies the various natural resources and landforms of the Conejo Valley; and

WHEREAS, a Conservation Element determines development policies applicable to such natural resources and landforms; and

WHEREAS, implementation techniques to carry out such policies have been identified; and

WHEREAS, a Conservation Element is required for inclusion in the General Plan by Section 65302(d) of the California Government Code; and

WHEREAS, the Thousand Oaks Planning Department has prepared a document entitled "Conservation Element - Thousand Oaks General Plan" labelled Exhibit "1" of this Resolution; and

WHEREAS, a legal public hearing on this matter was held by the Planning Commission of the City of Thousand Oaks, California, on the 5th day of June, 1972, after proper publication of said hearing was made as may be evidenced by documents on file; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission studied this matter and it was agreed that the Thousand Oaks General Plans should be amended

by the addition of a Conservation Element.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission approves the Conservation Element and recommends that the City Council of the City of Thousand Oaks, California, adopt said Element as an amendment to the Thousand Oaks General Plan.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing resolution was adopted by the Planning Commission of the City of Thousand Oaks at a regular meeting held on the 5th day of June, 1972, by the following vote:

AYES: Commissioners:

NOES: Commissioners:

ABSENT: Commissioners:

_____
Chairman, Planning Commission

_____
Secretary, Planning Commission

APPENDIX 1

MAMMALS IN VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

	ABUNDANCE	LOCATION	HABITAT
Badger	O	C	11
Bear	R	NF	12
Bobcat	FC	C	17
Chipmunk Coy	O	C	17
Coyote	FC	C	17
Deer	FC TO A	C	17
Fox, Grey	FC	C	13, 14, 15
Mountain Lion	R	C	17
Rabbit, Cottontail	FC	C	9, 11, 14, 15
Rabbit, Jack	FC	C	14, 15
Raccoon	FC	C	9, 10
Ring-tailed Cat	O	C	9, 15
Squirrel, Grey	O	C	12, 13
Squirrel, Ground	A	C	17
Skunk, Spotted	FC TO O	C	15, 16
Skunk, Striped	FC	C	9, 10, 11
Beaver	R	NF	9, 10
Muskrat	R	C	9, 10
Opossum	FC	C	9
Mice and Rats	A	C	17
Bats	R TO O	C	12, 13, 14, 16
Gopher	A	C	17

LEGEND

Abundance

A = Abundant
FC = Fairly Common
O = Occasional
R = Rare

Location

C = Countywide
NF = National Forest
PL = Private Land

Habitat

9 = Riparian - Canyon Bottom
10 = Lake Shore
11 = Grasslands - Potreros
12 = Coniferous Forests
13 = Oak Woodland
14 = Pinyon - Juniper - Sage
15 = Chaparral
16 = Cliffs - Rocky Areas
17 = May be present in variety of habitats